

Sharing Christ with Shia Muslims

by John Koski

A beautiful March snow covered Dearborn as I was cross-country skiing in Hemlock Park — three blocks from my apartment. I am the chaplain for the X-C Ski Headquarters Team, and on this day I was training for the Michigan Cup relays. The X-C Team has had the good fortune to win the relays and the Michigan Cup for two years consecutively.

For cross-country practice runs in Hemlock Park — I usually set up a classic track, and ski on it for an hour. This day was different because about 1,000 Iraqi Shia Muslims marched into the parking lot for a memorial rally. The men came with signs and flags chanting in Arabic. The women were dressed all in black and walked on the opposite sidewalk. Police directed the traffic and tried to keep the marchers on the sidewalks.

I was skiing back and forth in front of the marchers as they entered the park. Arriving from their two-mile walk from the Karbala Mosque, they used loudspeakers to chant in Arabic about their hero, Imam Hussein, the grandson of Muhammad. From the cacophony of sounds I could pick out drums, cymbals and trumpets.

Being curious to see what was happening in the middle of the crowd, I climbed a snowbank to get a good view. I was shocked when I looked down to see approximately 20 men beating themselves with chains. I had seen Muslims in Dearborn slap their chests repeatedly, but I had never seen anything like this.

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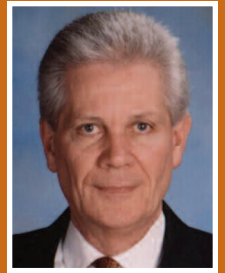




Until All Have Heard

How then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? —Romans 10:14

Jim Bennett, Director
Center for
Ministry to Muslims



CMM staff members are constantly traveling in and out of Muslim areas — and often they observe God’s hand at work in the lives of Muslims. I want to share an incredible story that is truly fresh from the crucible of experience.

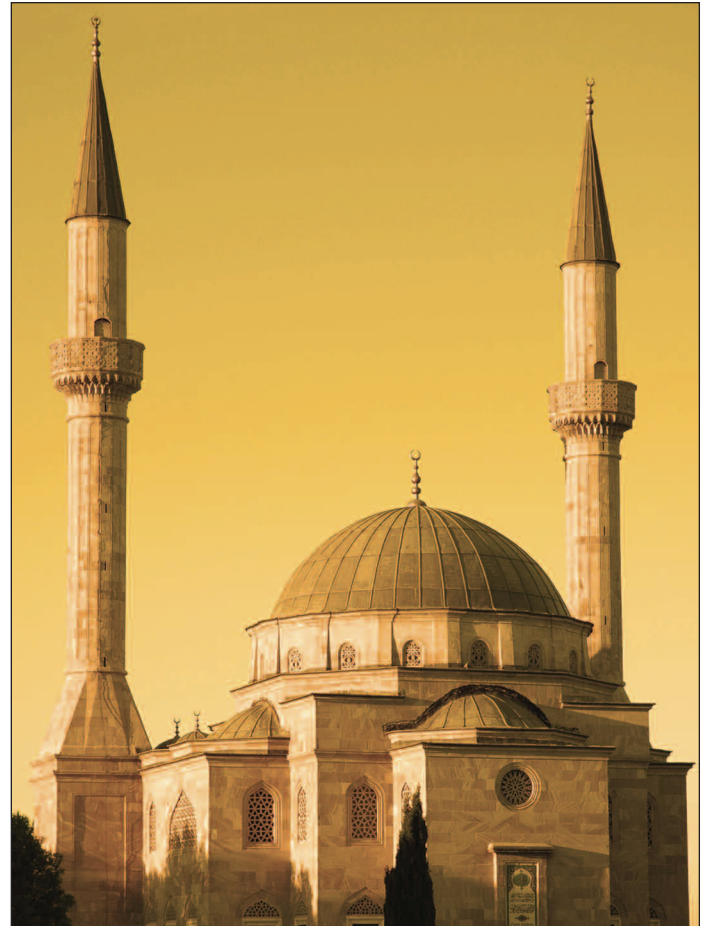
This is a story about Danilo. Previously, Danilo was a spy for a militant Muslim group trying to overthrow the government on his home island in the Philippines. His wife converted to Christianity before he did. Danilo made a regular habit of interrupting church services to angrily drag her out. But one day he came into the church and decided to sit down.

As Danilo heard the gospel preached for the very first time, the Holy Spirit convicted him and he went forward to receive salvation. Everyone saw the immediate change in Danilo’s life. He stopped drinking alcohol, he left the rebel group, and focused his life on evangelizing his own Muslim tribe.

Danilo heard about the *Muslim Evangelism Training School* held each year in a northern Filipino city and desperately wanted to attend with his wife. There was one huge problem: Danilo was deaf in one ear and going to classes would be very difficult. They had enough savings to buy a hearing aid, but they would not have enough left over to travel to the school. In faith they had to decide which was more important. They chose to go to the school just as they were, trusting God to take care of them.

The plan was for Danilo to sit as close to the teacher as possible and have his wife whisper the lecture into his ears each day. On the very first day of class, one of our CMM missionaries was leading a morning devotional. During the Bible study Danilo started crying. He wasn’t crying quietly either. He was weeping loudly. No one could ignore it.

Danilo then stood up, raised his hands (still weeping



loudly) and began to worship the Lord and thank God for His goodness. You see, a miracle had just occurred. Danilo’s right ear had opened up and he was hearing from it clearly for the first time in many years. Everyone praised God for rewarding Danilo and his wife’s faith. They had chosen to train for ministry to reach Muslims — and God had provided the hearing aid! Today they are in the trenches in their country, working to reach the Muslim people group from which Danilo comes.

With great regularity, signs and wonders like this accompany our work in the Muslim world. I do not believe that these signs and wonders happen in a vacuum. I am convinced they are the product of someone’s strong intercession. *Please keep praying.*



Muslim World News



Jordan

HONOR KILLING VICTIM DROWNED IN DEAD SEA

A Jordanian judicial official says the country's state prosecutor has charged a man with premeditated murder who is suspected of drowning his 22-year-old sister on suspicion of having an extra-marital affair. The official says the unidentified woman's brother beat her with the help of his family, and then transported her to the Dead Sea, where he subsequently drowned her. The official says the state prosecutor also charged the woman's parents and another brother with assisting in the murder by knowing about it and for beating the woman before she died. The prosecutor says the family carried out their suspected actions after seeing an unidentified man leaving the slain woman's house. — *AP*

[Though not an exclusively Islamic practice, most *honor killings* do occur in Muslim countries.]

Algeria

CHRISTIAN SENTENCED FOR CARRYING BIBLE

An Algerian Christian detained five days for carrying a Bible and personal Bible study books was handed a \$460 fine and a one-year suspended prison sentence. A court in Djilfa charged the 33-year-old Muslim convert to Christianity with "printing, storing and distributing" illegal religious material. The Protestant, who requested anonymity for security reasons, told fellow Christians in his home city of Tiaret that police pressured him to return to Islam while in custody. Since January, officials have closed up to half of the country's 50 estimated Protestant congregations. Officials have cited a February 2006 law governing non-Muslim worship. Clarified by subsequent decrees in 2007, the law restricts religious meetings to approved places and forbids any attempt to "shake the faith of a Muslim." — *Compass*

Jordan

TRIAL FOR CONVERSION TO CHRISTIANITY

On trial for converting from Islam to Christianity, a Jordanian may lose legal custody of his children and have his marriage annulled if found guilty of "apostasy." Mohammad Abbad, 40, fled after Muslims violently attacked him and his 10-year-old son and his father sued him on apostasy charges, or leaving Islam. "I can't win this case as long as I insist that I converted from Islam to Christianity," Abbad wrote from a nearby country. "The court will annul my marriage, I will be deprived of my kids, I will be with no ID or passport, and my properties will be confiscated." In a separate November 2004 ruling, an Amman Sharia Court headed by Judge Suleiman Abdullah Abu Yahya convicted a Muslim convert to Christianity of apostasy. Stripped of all his legal rights, the convert and his family fled Jordan to escape the verdict. — *Compass*

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A young man standing nearby asked about my skis. I answered his questions and then took the opportunity to request an explanation of the events unfolding before my eyes. He said, “Today is the fortieth and last day of the mourning period following *Ashura*. *Ashura* is the day on which Imam Hussein sacrificed his life in A.D. 680 to save the teachings of Islam.”

Another young boy stood on the snowbank near me. He held a wooden handle-like object that had many strands of small chains on it. He demonstrated how to use it by striking his back in an over-the-shoulder movement, all done following the three-beat rhythm of the drums and chanting. I asked if I might handle the object, and he readily granted permission. In an awkward attempt to see just how hard it might be to strike my own back with this instrument, I looked up and noted that an Iraqi television camera was focused right on me!

The cameraman came closer and asked for an interview. I skied to the center angle of the camera, looked squarely into it and said, “This event reminds me of the Christian Good Friday mourning. On Good Friday we remember when Jesus died on the cross for our sins.”

To understand the significance of what was happening that day in the park, it is necessary to know something about the Shia memorial of *Ashura*. Ahmed Ali Khan, a Shia writer, says:

Ashura is the day on which, in the year A.D. 680, in a place called Karbala, in Iraq, Imam Hussein, sacrificed his life in order to save the teachings of Islam from utter distortion by Muslims who were hypocrites. As Hussein journeyed from Medina to Karbala he informed his companions that he and those who would accompany him were going to die. Hussein created a clear, incisive demarcation between right and wrong, for his time and all time to come. Hussein encapsulated all the teachings of Islam in the field of Karbala, creating a beacon of light for truth seekers of all times. Shia Muslims love

Hussein with a selfless love beyond compare. The mourning is a way to remind Shia Muslims of Hussein's incomparable sacrifice, a way to thank him, a way to express love for him, and a way to broadcast to the world his message of true freedom.

Shias make up about 10 percent to 15 percent of the world's 1.2 billion Muslims. The largest Shia country is Iran. However, most Muslims are Sunnis — who



consider themselves to be the more orthodox community of Muslims. When Muhammad died in A.D. 632, his successor was in dispute. The majority of his followers felt that the successor should be decided by “consensus of the community.” The

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minority camp felt that the successor should be a blood relative to Muhammad. They became known as Shia — “partisans” or “those who broke away.” The majority group were known as Sunnis — “people of the right way.” Throughout the centuries of Islamic history the divide between Sunnis and Shias has been pronounced and often tense.

The divide between Sunnis and Shias is well illus-



trated in the country of Iraq. The Muslim population of Iraq is approximately 60 percent Sunni and 40 percent Shia. The Sunni minority leader, Saddam Hussein, came to power through a coup. For many years Saddam held sway over the majority Shias. On

many occasions he persecuted the Shia community. When Saddam was finally toppled, it was a clear victory for the Shia Iraqis.

On April 9, 2003, when the 40-foot tall statue of Saddam Hussein was pulled down in Baghdad, I was in Dearborn at the home of my Shia friends Anwar Hassan, Fatima and Ali. They were elated to see the huge image of Saddam pulled to the ground. Why? Because just a few years before Saddam had given the order to bomb their home in Najaf, Iraq. They fled Iraq and lived in a refugee camp in Saudi Arabia for six years before coming to America. For my Shia friends, the destruction of that statue showed the world that Saddam was no longer in charge.

In the 2008 edition of *Praying for Muslims*, the author writes:

In the past few decades the people of Iraq have gone from comfort and ease to immeasurable suffering.

Under Saddam's ruthless regime people endured untold atrocities. They were terrorized and their lives were filled with fear. Hundreds of thousands of men were killed in military operations. Thousands of women and children suffered from lack of nourishment and medical help. Many people were maimed, jailed or murdered at whim for not falling in line with those in authority.

After the second Gulf War, Iraqis heaved a sigh of relief. Their abusers were gone. But alas, that was a short lived period of joy and elation. Insurgents are wreaking havoc and death among both the innocent and guilty. Yet, it seems that these difficulties have caused many Iraqis to look to Christ, the true Deliverer. So we are seeing some doors open to minister to the people of Iraq with compassion, love and sacrifice.

There are complex issues in reaching Muslims with the gospel, especially Shia Muslims. Thank you for

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praying for my Shia friends in Dearborn. It would not be wise to give the full names of these friends, but they can be represented in your prayer time by using these substitute names: Anwar Hassan, Fatima, Abbas, Muhammad, Ali, Zahra, and Hussein. As you



pray, keep in mind that these are real people!

In Dearborn, Shia Muslims from Iraq are hearing the good news that Jesus died on the cross for their sins. This year I have spent time with Iraqis in Dearborn such as Dr. Abid, who is a dentist; Dr. Ahmad, a general practitioner; and Mahmoud, who is a student. I have taken them to events sponsored by a local church and they really enjoyed it. I taught all three of them cross-country skiing this winter! I am more convinced than ever that the Lord takes our gifts and uses them to build bridges to those who need and seek Him. All we need to do is make our gifts available to Him.

Please join me in praying the following prayer:

First, I pray for peace in Iraq. May the God of peace rule over that nation and protect the people from further bloodshed and suffering.

Almighty God, help us, your Church, to wake up to our responsibilities toward the Iraqi people. They need Jesus to be the master of their lives. Help us not to squander this opportunity. Deliver us from indifference and apathy. Forgive us for our past lack of concern. Raise up a mighty army of believers to declare Christ's love and righteousness in Iraq.

Bless the efforts to distribute gospel literature. Anoint the churches and leaders. Bless the Bible school and discipleship programs. Give Christian workers in Iraq a unity of spirit to work under you, the one Lord.

I also pray, dear Lord, for the thousands of Muslim Iraqis in the United States and other countries. So many are in transition and are trying to make cultural adjustments. Speak to your Church to befriend them and show them your love.

May Iraqis choose to accept Jesus' love and honor his death on the cross. Send your Holy Spirit upon them and fill them with your peace and joy.





JUMAA PRAYER FELLOWSHIP

**PRAYING FOR MUSLIMS
AROUND THE WORLD!**



Friday, July 4, 2008. Please pray

...for 2 million Muslims in Myanmar (Burma) affected by the recent devastating cyclone.

...for legislation to genuinely criminalize “honor killings” in Muslim countries.

...for Muslim Background Believers (MBBs) in Iran. The parliament is considering making apostasy punishable by death. Apostasy has long been illegal, but is currently punishable by prison and forced labor.

Friday, July 11, 2008. Please pray

...for nearly 1 million expatriate Christians in Saudi Arabia. Pray they would have opportunity to witness to Muslims in this closed country.

...that an intense campaign against the Church in Algeria (an estimated 70,000 Christians) would subside. Pray particularly for 3 Protestant leaders sentenced to three years in prison for “attacking religion and the person of the Prophet.”

...for unrest to end in Muslim areas of the Philippines. A complex array of splinter groups is fighting against the central government, demanding political autonomy and Sharia law.

Friday, July 18, 2008. Please pray

...for stability in Lebanon. Islamist groups and political factions appear to be pulling Lebanon away from progress.

...for government leaders in the United Arab Emirates (U.A.E.). Pray that the U.A.E. might continue to be a small window for the gospel of Jesus Christ to reach Muslims.

...for harvest among the Hadrami Arab Muslims in Indonesia.

Friday, July 25, 2008. Please pray

...for mission organizations in Afghanistan. After Muslim clerics protested the presence of Christian organizations, many of these same groups are being denied visas — even if not directly involved in evangelistic work.

...for Tajikistan. Officially a secular country, Islamic traditions are strong and Tajikistan is experiencing an Islamic revival in many cities. Converts to Christianity face threats and danger.

...for evangelical Christians in Jordan. Government officials recently closed down a church, and there is growing pressure against believers in Jordan.

**I URGE, THEN, FIRST OF ALL THAT REQUESTS, PRAYERS, INTERCESSION AND
THANKSGIVING BE MADE FOR EVERYONE. —1 TIMOTHY 2:1, NIV**



JUMAA PRAYER FELLOWSHIP

**PRAYING FOR MUSLIMS
AROUND THE WORLD!**



Friday, August 1, 2008. Please pray

...for continued successful witness to Muslims through print, television, radio, and Internet ministries.

...for satellite television to continue to reach Muslims. Recently, several Muslim countries have made overtures suggesting a coming attempt to restrict television content.

...for increased Christian witness to Muslims in Europe. The potential Islamic demographic increase in Europe over the next 50 years is staggering. May opportunities for the gospel of Jesus Christ to be heard by Muslims abound.

Friday, August 8, 2008. Please pray

...for increasing numbers of expatriate believers in Brunei. Pray they would be salt and light.

...for government leaders in Malaysia to be given wisdom as the country continues to see a rise in Islamist activity.

...for an Egyptian MBB that has been refused legal recognition of his conversion and faces a lengthy court battle.

Friday, August 15, 2008. Please pray

...for an Algerian convicted of carrying a Bible and Christian study books. He received a one-year suspended sentence and a \$460 fine, but will additionally face scrutiny and threats.

...for Muslims in Nigeria. Sharia and a shift toward radicalism are contributing to a volatile political climate.

...for Turkey's tiny Protestant minority. Violence and threats from the Islamic majority have steadily increased in 2008.

Friday, August 22, 2008. Please pray

...for religious freedom in Indonesia. Between 2004 and 2007, 110 churches were shut down by Muslim authorities.

...for children in madrassahs (Islamic schools) across the Muslim world. Pray they would have the opportunity to hear of Jesus's love.

...for Muslims in the Central Asian countries. Pray that the gospel would reach the hearts of so many hungry people.

Friday, August 29, 2008. Please pray

...for Muslims in the United States. Pray for the Christian workers trying to reach them, especially in urban centers.

...for Christian ministries among the 500,000 Western Cham in Cambodia. The Cham are related to the Malay of Malaysia and many are followers of Islam.

...for MBBs across the Muslim world desperately searching for discipleship and fellowship.